

Ex. Doc. No. 55.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

PUBLIC PROPERTY AT GOVERNOR'S ISLAND, N. Y.

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

TRANSMITTING,

In answer to a resolution of the House of the 20th of December last, reports in regard to the value, &c., of the public property at Governor's island, New York.

FEBRUARY 15, 1849.

Laid upon the table, and ordered to be printed.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington, February 6, 1849.

SIR: Pursuant to a resolution of the House of Representatives of the 20th of December last, I have caused "an estimate of the value of the public property, including the soil on Governor's island in the harbor of New York, to be made;" and have the honor to submit herewith reports from the head-quarters of the army, the engineer office, and ordnance bureau, containing the information required, and with their views upon the subject of "ceding the said island, and so much of the public property as cannot be moved, to the city of New York."

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

W. L. MARCY,

Secretary of War.

Hon. R. C. WINTHROP,

Speaker of the House of Representatives.

ENGINEER DEPARTMENT,
Washington, February, 1849.

SIR: The resolution of the House of Representatives of December 20, 1848, calling for an estimate of the value of the public property, including the soil, on Governor's island, in the harbor of New York, being referred to this office for report, was immediately transmitted to Major Delafield, the chief engineer in that harbor, with instructions to obtain and report as soon as practicable the information called for by the resolution.

Major Delafield's estimate is transmitted herewith, from which it appears that the value of the property, taken into account by him, amounts to \$2,151,660 55.

This sum does not, however, include the early expenditures on Governor's island, as to which, finding no information in this office, I asked a statement of the Third Auditor. From this statement, this morning received, I learn that from 1st October, 1824, to December 31, 1848, there has been expended for fortifications on Governor's Island the sum of..... \$319,910 33

I also learn that from 1794 to the close of the war with Great Britain, there was expended for fortifications in the harbor of New York, without any designation of particular forts or works, the further sum of \$2,013,915 02. Knowing the nature and extent of the several works of that period, I am confident in stating that we shall be within bounds if we take two-thirds of this amount as appertaining to Governor's island, namely..... 1,342,610 00

Between 1st January, 1817, and 31st December, 1825, there was also expended, according to the same authority under the same general head, the sum of \$6,170 48; assigning one-half for Governor's island, we must add..... 3,085 24

Total expenditures on the fortifications of Governor's island to 31st December, 1848..... 1,665,605 57

Add now for buildings independent of the forts, as barracks, quarters, hospital, ordnance establishments, &c., &c., as per Major Delafield's estimate of their value, the sum of..... 100,923 00

Total value of forts, buildings, &c..... 1,766,528 57

There should be added to above amount the sum charged to the United States by the State of New York, on the transfer of the island and the old forts by the State; and to this end Major Delafield addressed some inquiries to the comptroller of the State; but it is not considered proper longer to delay this report in waiting for a reply.

For the value of the ground or soil of the island,
 I assume Major Delafield's estimate, which
 amounts to..... \$1,493,750 00

Making a grand total of..... 3,260,278 57

The above statement is confined to the money value to the United States of Governor's island, and its forts, batteries, and other structures. But great as this value undoubtedly is, under any principle of estimation, it cannot serve as a measure of the importance of the island in the system of defence. In this sense it is invaluable. It cannot be dispensed with. No positions can be found to take the place, in the duty of protecting the citizens of New York and Brooklyn, and the navy yard from an enemy's fleet, of the batteries of 180 guns of large calibre, all well placed and effective, on this island.

Were all the defences which are projected for the Narrows, Sandy Hook, and the approach by the East river, completed and in perfect condition, it would still be necessary to maintain the works in question; because, without them, a few heavily armed vessels, steamers, or others, which had survived the passage of the outer batteries, or had slipped past those works while they were occupied with the main portion of the enemy's fleet, might levy a contribution, or greatly injure the cities and destroy the navy yard.

In all military arrangements it is necessary, moreover, to provide against defeat; and accordingly we are bound to provide against the consequences of an unavailing opposition, from whatever cause, by the outer line of defences; in which case, the formidable array of guns upon Governor's island would, in conjunction with the smaller works on Bedlow's and Ellis's islands, be the only remaining defence of these great cities and of one of the greatest naval depots of the country.

But the exterior defences are far from completion, or even from a state of advancement calculated to inspire confidence, should we become engaged with a powerful enemy, a state which, according to the past and the probable rate of appropriation, will not be attained for a quarter of a century. To relinquish the occupation of Governor's island as a vital point in the system of permanent defence; to do anything, or suffer anything to be done, which would weaken this position against attack, lessen its efficiency, or throw back its state of preparation, would therefore be, to say the least, an act of extreme imprudence.

It may be alleged, as it has been, that the works are inferior, imperfect in construction and bad in principle. Such statements would not only convey much more than just criticism would sanction, but what is of more consequence, would give false impressions. There are faults, undoubtedly, in each of the works in question; for example, the same number of guns might have been established at less expense, the scope or field of fire of each gun might have been more extended, &c. Still these are, each and all, most efficient works, and defensible against any effort of an enemy.

Every gun of the 180 in number is either now mounted and perfectly ready for action, or may be so prepared in a few hours. All the arrangements and preparations for guns are of the best kind, permanent and always in good condition. The magazines are shot and shell proof; the shot furnaces are ready to be lighted. This condition of entire readiness is the result of the repairs and improvements of the last few years.

As it will probably be thought the duty of the department to exhibit the importance of this island in relation to other military interests as an ordnance depot, as a place for the concentration of troops, &c., I shall say no more than that I do not see how it would be possible to supply its place in reference to such uses.

There are many considerations connected with the subject which I should urge, if they had not been presented in the report of Major Delafield to Major General Scott, and sanctioned by that high officer.

The conditions on which the island was conveyed to the United States by the State of New York, as shown by Major Delafield in that report, will of course obtain due consideration.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, sir, your obedient servant,

J. G. TOTTEN,

Brevet Brigadier General and Chief of Engineers.

W. L. MARCY,

Secretary of War.

Estimate of the value of the public property, including the soil on Governor's island, in the harbor of New York, made with a view of ceding the said island, and so much of the public property as cannot be moved to the city of New York, under a resolution of the House of Representatives of the 20th of December, 1848.

Ordnance depot.—Two store houses.....	\$9,794 60
Officers' quarters.....	6,919 62
Artificers' quarters.....	4,519 62
Armorsers' shop.....	580 65
Smiths' shop.....	580 66
Stable.....	387 46
Fire pump, reservoir and hose house.....	480 06
Sea wall, enclosing depot.....	23,172 24
Iron fence on sea wall.....	665 09
Head-quarters.....	47,600 00
Hospital and out buildings, within the brick enclosure.....	12,000 00
Quartermaster's store, built in 1848.....	14,000 00
Asphalte factory and stores.....	4,300 00
Store house for ordnance of the port.....	1,500 00
Bakery.....	2,261 00
Engineer depot, with frame building attached thereto.....	1,750 00
Guard house and offices.....	4,266 00
Surgeon's quarters, frame building.....	3,724 00
Soldiers' barracks, frame building, very old but extensive.....	1,543 00
Commissary and quartermaster's stores, near wharf.....	5,725 00
Quartermaster's stables, near wharf.....	2,789 00
Stone wharf and landing.....	565 00
	31,678 48

Castle Williams.—20,000 cubic yards of masonry at \$10	\$200,000 00	
7,000 cubic yards masonry at \$5.....	35,000 00	
Stair ways in towers	1,000 00	
Pintle blocks and traverse circles.....	7,800 00	
1,500 c. yards brick masonry in arches at \$7..	10,500 00	
350 feet iron railing in terreplein	640 00	
Large gates and doors in castle. (51).....	2,551 00	
Small gates in towers, &c., (14).....	280 00	
Large gates, entrance, (1).....	250 00	
Sashes in embrasures, 3d tier.....	75 00	
Shutters in embrasures, 1st and 2d tiers.....	130 00	
Flagging, 13,800 feet.....	2,070 00	
Shot furnace.....	1,240 00	
Floors of 2d and 3d tiers, gallery of communication, buildings over stair-ways, asphalt on barbette, roofs and lining of magazines, with copper gutters, &c.....	26,444 65	
		\$287,980 65
South battery.—Masonry of scarp, interior face of rampart, traverse circles and pintle blocks, shot furnace, officers and soldiers' quarters, as constructed by Captains Saunders and Dutton, Colonel Smith and Major Delafield.....		16,045 53
Fort Columbus.—Stone face of scarp, officers and soldiers' quarters, gateway, magazines, faces of counterscarp, interior face and coping of glacis, drawbridge, &c., as constructed by Colonels De Russey and Smith, Captains Saunders, Dutton and Barnard, and Major Delafield, being additions to the work as received from the State of New York		220,182 89
To which add the cost of Fort Columbus and south battery, or the value thereof, as received from the State of New York, under the acts of Congress and of the State for settling the revolutionary debt		
To which add the expense of grading the island, as executed during the agency of Captain Wiley and Colonel Post.....		
Total estimated value of the forts and buildings		<u>657,910 55</u>

Estimate of the value of the soil.

The entire surface of the island bounded by right lines, at low water mark, is 71.95 acres, which being divided into lots of 20' × 100' and separated by streets; in conformity with the divisions in the best regulated parts of the city of New York, gives a total of 1,019 lots; and taking the value of the lots and grounds at South Brooklyn, which have been sold since January, 1847, as a standard of comparison, the value will be as follows:

	In range No 1 on the water	107 lots at \$4,000	\$428,000	
	do do	60 do 3,000	180,000	
	do do	104 do 2,000	208,000	
271 lots.				\$816,000
	In range No. 2 parallel to No. 1.....	78 do 2,500	195,000	
	do do	50 do 2,000	100,000	
	do do	89 do 1,500	120,000	
208				415,000
	In range No. 3.....	78 do 1,500	117,000	
	do	50 do 1,200	60,000	
	do	69 do 1,000	69,000	
197				246,000
	In range No. 4.....	54 do 1,000	54,000	
	do	84 do 700	58,800	
138				112,800
	In range No. 5.....	48 do 750	36,000	
	do	6 do 700	4,200	
	do	67 do 500	33,500	
121				73,700

	In range No. 6.....	25	do	500	\$12,500	
55	do	30	do	350	10,500	
						\$23,000
	In range No. 7.....	29	do	250	7,250	
29						7,250
	1,019 lots valued at.....					1,693,750

The total estimated value of the soil is as above, if put into the hands of commissioners to sell on the most advantageous terms, and after making the best arrangements to fix the value of the several ranges. To give this value, the water front should be wharfed, the expense of which should be deducted from the above..... 200,000

Leaving the estimated value of the soil..... 1,493,750

NEW YORK, January 13, 1849.

RICHARD DELAFIELD,
Major of Engineers.

Report of the engineer superintending the defences of the harbor of New York on the importance of Governor's island, and the military works erected on it, with respect to the defence of the harbor of New York, and the general convenience and necessities of the service.

This report is called for by the major general in conformity with the requirements of a resolution of the House of Representatives of the 20th instant, calling for an estimate of the value of the public property, including the soil on Governor's island, with a view of ceding the island, and so much of the public property as cannot be removed, to the city of New York.

It is first necessary to examine the title of the United States to the soil of this island, to ascertain whether or not the right exists to cede this property to the city of New York, or make any other disposition of it than for the defence of the harbor.

The act of Congress of the 20th of March, 1794, authorises the President of the United States to fortify certain harbors, including that of New York. The third section declares that it shall be lawful for the President of the United States to receive from any State (in behalf of the United States) a cession of the lands on which any of the *fortifications aforesaid*, with the necessary buildings, may be erected, or intended to be erected; or, where such cessions shall not be made, to purchase such lands in behalf of the United States; provided, that *no purchase shall be made* where such lands are *the property of a State*.

The act of Congress of the 3d of May, 1798, sets forth that, where any State was found indebted to the United States, on settlement of accounts, shall proceed to finish or complete any fortifications heretofore commenced by such State for the defence of any port or harbor within the same, or shall make or erect any additional fortifications, pursuant to the act of 1797—as well as the previous expenditure made since the 20th of March, 1794, which

shall be approved by the President as the expenditures which have been or which shall be directed by him—shall be allowed and credited to such State, on account of the balance found and reported as aforesaid; provided, that the *fortifications* for which the whole or any part of the expenditure shall be so allowed and credited as aforesaid, with *their privileges and appurtenances*, shall be declared and established as *the property of the United States* WHILE MAINTAINED BY THEM.

The second section of this act of 1798 sets forth that these words of the act of the 23d of June, 1797, entitled "an act for the further defence of the ports and harbors of the United States," that is to say, "provided, the said States shall and do cede to the United States the *lands or places* on which such fortifications shall be so erected, in cases where the *lands* are the property of such State," shall be and the same are hereby repealed.

The act of the State of New York of the 15th of February, 1800, sets forth, that the following islands in and about the harbor of New York, and in and about the fortifying of which this State hath heretofore expended or cause to be expended large sums of money, to wit, Bedlow's island, Oyster island, Governor's island, on which Fort Jay is situated, shall hereafter be *subject to the jurisdiction of the United States*.

The act of the State of New York of the 28th March, 1800, sets forth that the State of New York engages to spend within five years from that date, in erecting, enlarging and completing fortifications within the State, at such places the jurisdiction whereof shall be previously to such expenditure ceded to the United States, or places to be approved by the President of the United States, a sum of money, which, with the sums already expended by the State since the establishment of the present government of the United States in fortifying any place within this State, and for which this State may be credited, as hereinafter mentioned, shall be equal to the sum assumed by the United States in the debt of this State. This being in conformity with the act of Congress of the 15th February, 1799.

This comprises all the legislation I find bearing upon the right of the United States to Governor's island, and gives no right to soil any longer than it may be used for the defence of the harbor of New York. I can find no deed or conveyance of the fee of this property to the United States, nor any legal right vested in it to cede the same to the city of New York, under any circumstances whatever.

It might suffice to let the subject rest here, but that the major general asks for other information in relation to the fortifications and uses of Governor's island; the more important to be distinctly set forth, as there is danger of the public interest being sacrificed for the want of this information.

We may gain some knowledge of the actual importance of the fortifications on Governor's island by referring to a history of the past.

At the period of our revolutionary war, and after Washington

had driven the British army from Boston and marched his army to New York, this island was occupied, and was, with the batteries on Red Hook and the end of York island, the only defence against a fleet entering and occupying the harbor of New York. Such was their importance that the fleet and forces of Lord Howe, rather than encounter the injury and risk of forcing or reducing them, and thus cut off Washington's retreat from Long Island, preferred meeting the enemy on the beach at Gravesend bay, and in the field make battle with our troops to force us from Long Island, and thus gain the city and evacuation of the islands, rather than attempt to subdue them with the broadsides of his ships. The fortifications on Governor's island served at that time to protect the city and command the harbor against an enemy's fleet.

Again, during the war of 1812 to 1815, those fortifications on Governor's island, in connexion with those on Bedlow's and Ellis's islands, were our greatest reliance in defending our inner harbor against the ingress and entire control of the city and harbor of New York, and its inland water communications with the southern and eastern States.

At the Narrows the United States then had some guns mounted on the Long Island shore, and the State of New York had constructed some open batteries opposite on the Staten Island shore; but the experience of the revolution taught the necessity of supporting these batteries, unprotected as they were on the land side, by a large military force of not less at one time than 20,000 men, under Governor Tompkins. It was to this large force, drawn from the militia of the State, and kept under arms for months from their accustomed industry and occupation, that we had to rely for maintaining ourselves against another landing in Gravesend bay, and to the forts in the harbor for security against a fleet.

Important as the fortifications in the harbor then were, it must not be disguised that at the present time, with the changes introduced in the art of war, by the introduction of heavier artillery, and the use that will inevitably be made of steam frigates and steam transports, we are in greater want of sea coast batteries now than ever. This harbor and city is more readily approached now, than either during the revolutionary war or war of 1812 to 1815. We know that Great Britain has removed her naval depot from Halifax to the more central position and milder climate of Bermuda, where facilities are already provided on a large scale for equipping a fleet, protected by strong and permanent fortifications, upon which they are still laboring. These can only look to the contingency of a rupture with this country to justify such heavy expenses as they involve. We know, also, that her steam packets ply regularly every month to and from Bermuda and this port, and in about seventy-five hours from port to port. In this short time a fleet of steamers, having taken on board an army at Bermuda, can be in Gravesend bay, and in half a day may be on shore, from whence to the navy yard is a march of not to exceed *two hours*. Its destruction must be the consequence of such an expedition, together with so much of Brooklyn and the mercantile fleet at the docks on the

East river as he would or could give the time to destroy before retreating to his ships. We have not a gun mounted to prevent such a result, and our experience teaches us that the main reliance of the nation, the militia, is not available at so short a notice.

It must be recollected that at the Narrows we have as yet but commenced to fortify the Staten island shore. All the batteries that now exist on that side of the channel are unprotected in the rear, and can be carried without opposing any resistance on the land side. The marines of a fleet would suffice to capture these batteries from the rear, without a body of troops there encamped to protect them. The Narrows, our greatest security against a fleet when well fortified, is now quite in an unfinished and indefensible condition. To sacrifice our interior defences before having something elsewhere to rely upon, would be at once abandoning the wealth of this metropolis to the cupidity of an enemy, and its fall would carry with it our naval resources at Brooklyn, and the interruption of the great channels of communication inland, now centreing at and passing through this city. Governor's island still continues to hold the same importance in the defence of the harbor that it has always done, and is now more reliable, from the increased strength of the barrier, against the passage of a fleet, by the co-operation of the works at Bedlow's island, which, with those on Governor's island, form opposing batteries to a fleet of 132 guns, besides rendering the interior of the harbor impracticable for an enemy's anchorage while these batteries remain unsilenced, and he must, therefore, destroy them before he can remain in undisturbed possession of the harbor. But Fort Columbus is of a character *not to be injured* by ships' batteries; no part of its walls can be seen from a ship, and these must be breached before this work can be taken; to erect breaching batteries, a landing on the island must be effected and the delays of a siege undergone. Herein is our security; no European enemy can hope for success under such circumstances.

But this island, again, is the only reliable point from whence we can command the approach to the navy yard by Buttermilk channel, in the absence of outer defences of sufficient strength. South Battery, on that island, is of inestimable value and importance in this point of view.

Again, let us even consider that the outer defences are perfected, and that an attack is made by a fleet upon the forts at the Narrows; still the interior harbor defences are indispensable, and the works on Governor's island of greater necessity than the other interior forts. Such an attack on the forts at the Narrows, if made, is not to be of short duration. As great as the force of the artillery of the forts may be, a corresponding, and in the estimation of an enemy a greater force must be brought against them, with any chances of success. If we measure this time of a battle between a well appointed fleet and these land batteries, by experience elsewhere, we shall find that the wooden walls of a fleet have held out, and continued an obstinate attack or defence, from four to six hours. Exmouth laid before the batteries of Algiers six hours; Nelson before

those of Copenhagen five hours; Admiral Gambier's attack upon the Danish batteries at Copenhagen continued four hours; the French ships against the batteries in the harbors of Cadiz four hours on the first day, and eight hours on the second day; the Spanish armament against the water batteries of Gibraltar thirteen hours; Commodore Ford against Fort Brissantan, in the harbor of Port Prince, six hours and a half; the English fleet against the batteries at Ostend four hours.

If, then, during such an action at the Narrows, the steam frigates (which, so far as we yet know, are unsuited for battering ships) should leave the battle to be fought by the ships of the line, and push with all celerity for the navy yard, via Buttermilk channel, before the probable expiration of the battle at the Narrows, would have time to reach the navy yard, set fire to and destroy it, and return to their fleet to join in its further movements—probably to tow them into the outer bay for security; but, after having done us incalculable injury both at the navy yard and among the shipping lining the shores of the East river. It is only by having a second line of defence, as in this case—the fortifications on Governor's and Bedlow's islands—that we could prevent such a result.

And again, the importance of continuing and preserving this inner and second line of defence must not be overlooked in the powerful influence it must have upon an enemy who, having fought a desperate action at the Narrows, finds his object only half accomplished; even if he be successful, he then has a like desperate effort to encounter with batteries mounting 132 guns, and himself in a crippled condition to undertake it. In this point of view the second line of defence at Governor's island (now the only one we have perfected) is all-important to us in our system of harbor defence.

As a depot for ordnance stores, Governor's island is not only important but indispensable to the military service, and not to be replaced. It is as important and necessary for the depot of military stores, and convenience to this branch of the military service, as the city of New York is to the commerce and trade of the United States. There is no point presenting the same facilities; nor, indeed, *any other* point that could be so used. Munitions of war are not allowed to be stored in the cities or towns bordering on the waters of this harbor. Governor's island is a safe depository therefor, (and we have no other in this harbor,) and from whence they can be shipped at all seasons of the year, and for the supply of any army we may have in the field.

The necessity for this island as a depot is also exemplified by the fact, that, although the Navy Department has extensive grounds at and near the navy yard, yet they are compelled to use the forts of this harbor as depositories for their ammunition, being the only position from whence it can be had at all seasons of the year, as necessity requires, and where it does not endanger the cities and adjacent towns.

Its necessity has for a long time been made manifest by the constant use made of it for quartering troops preparatory to embark-

ing for other stations. Arriving in New York from the recruiting rendezvous, or *en route* for other stations, and no boarding-houses or other accommodations for them in the city or in its vicinity, either in barracks or fields for encampment, there is an indispensable necessity for Governor's island as the only position offering these accommodations to the troops of the line, and there is no unoccupied locality in the vicinity of New York that could be purchased suited to these purposes.

As a depôt for the engineer service, too, it is important. For the preservation and repair of the works of defence in this harbor, there must be some central point, accessible at all times, whereat to keep on hand the tools and material peculiar to the engineer service, from whence they can be readily transported from the stores and warehouses, as wanted from time to time.

I come, then, to the conclusion that Governor's island and its fortifications is, and must continue to be, necessary for the defence of the port, harbor and city of New York; and indispensably necessary for all time to come as a depôt for the military establishment of the United States; that no other position can be found in the waters of this harbor to supply the same indispensable wants and necessities, and that there exists no right on the part of the United States to cede this island to the city of New York, or to make any other use of it than that to which it is now applied.

All of which is respectfully submitted, by your obedient servant,
RICHARD DELAFIELD.

Major of Engineers.

To Major Wm. G. FREEMAN,
Assistant Adjutant General.

[For the information of Major General Scott, commanding eastern division, United States army.]

NEW YORK, December 30, 1848.

[*Endorsement by Major General Scott on the above.*]

I adopt the within excellent report of the chief engineer of New York harbor as my own, which leaves me but little to add.

He (Major Delafield) is waiting, in the letter accompanying the report, for "some information from the State comptroller at Albany, connected with the settlement of the accounts referred to in the act of the State of New York of the 28th of March, 1800," to enable him to finish the estimate (in hand) of the cost of the work on Governor's island, and the value of the ground. When that estimate shall have been received at this office, it also shall be forwarded; but as the same information may, probably, be more readily obtained at the engineer bureau at Washington, I do not wait for it.

Concurring with Major Delafield as to the extreme importance of the islands, (Governor's and Bedlow's) as the inner line of de-

fence for this harbor and city, I beg to remark, if abandoned by the United States in time of peace, they will never be available for defence in time of war, without a re-purchase, at an enormous expense; for I believe there cannot be cited a solitary instance of the recovery of property of any kind by the United States, once loaned to or put in the possession of a State, a corporation or individual. This remark, of course, applies to the recent loan (I know not on what terms) of Bedlow's island to the corporation of New York, never having been, though the commander of this division of the army and on the spot, consulted by the War Department on the subject.

Respectfully submitted to the Secretary of War.

WINFIELD SCOTT.

HEAD-QUARTERS, EASTERN DIVISION,
New York, January 4, 1849.

ORDNANCE DEPARTMENT,
Washington, December 22, 1848.

SIR: In answer to the resolution of the House of Representatives of the 20th instant, referred by you to this office, I have the honor to state that the property at the ordnance depot on Governor's island, in the harbor of New York, is estimated by the last annual inventory, as follows:

Buildings, fences and sea walls.....	\$47,600 00
Ordnance stores of all kinds in the arsenal yard and ordnance buildings	1,023,195 49
	<hr/>
	1,070,795 49
Add value of the armament of Fort Columbus.....	52,479 00
Value of the armament of Castle Williams.....	47,512 00
	<hr/>
Total.....	\$1,170,786 49

The value of the land is not included in the above mentioned inventory, as it was already in use for military purposes when the depot was established.

I am, sir, with great respect, your obedient servant,

G. TALCOTT,
Colonel of Ordnance.

Hon. W. L. MARCY,
Secretary of War.